



EARTH DAY

April 22nd, 2009





EARTH DAY

The Earth Day Celebration is an opportunity to make people be aware of universal problems such as pollution, biodiversity preservation, and many other environmental worries.





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There is not a specific organization in charge of this celebration, but lots of NGO's, governments, and other entities prepare different activities all around the world to protect the environment.



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Human beings have used indiscriminately the natural resources throughout the years.

When communities run out of resources, they moved to another piece of land ending extensive areas of forests and promoting the extinction of native species.





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*Picture of Cuyahoga River during its fire in 1969
(© AP Images)*

With the Industrial Revolution and the development of the factories, the cities became great producers of remainders.

By the middle of the 30's and again at the beginning of the 50's, the Cuyahoga river in Ohio caught fire due to industrial waste poured by factories. Same thing happened in Michigan, Nueva York, Maryland and Pennsylvania.



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The pollution coming from factories, the indiscriminate use of pesticides and the felling for establishing industrial crops, became into a time bomb that the world wouldn't be aware of until 1962.



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In 1962, Rachel Carson, American Scientist, published her book "*Silent Spring*".

This publication caught the world's attention about the damages caused to human health and environment for the bad use of a powerful pesticide.



*Rachel Carson and her microscope, 1951.
(Collection of American Literature from Yale University).*



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In her book, Carson carefully states the long term dangers of the bad use of pesticides.

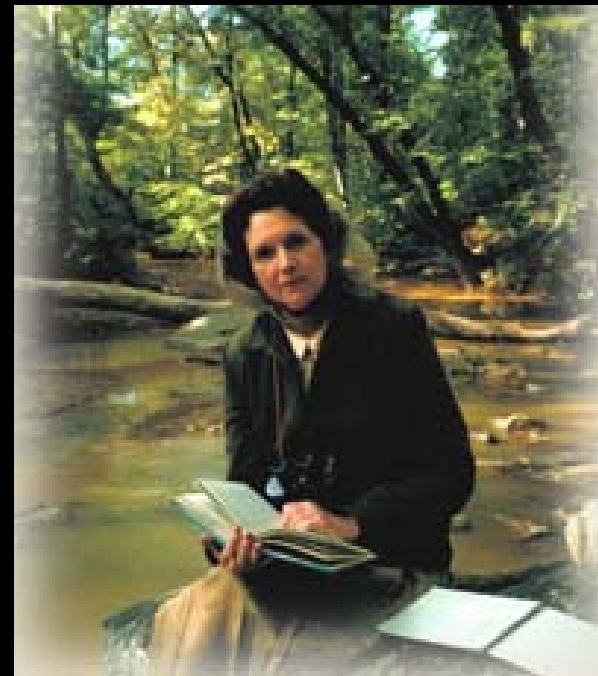
“Silent Spring” brought environmental awareness to the American people and brought them to a none precedent effort to safeguard nature from chemical destruction.



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Carson passed away in 1964, after fighting against breast cancer. When dying she didn't even suspected the great changes that her book would produce in the American Legislation.

Linda Lear, biographer of Carson wrote: "While facing the attacks against herself and in spite of the fact that she was very sick, Rachel Carson was a truly example of the power of an individual to produce a change".



*Photo taken in 1964, a year before she died
(Photos Time & Life/Getty Images/Alfred Eisenstaedt)*



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(NASA's picture)

In 1968, when the crew of Apollo 8 arrived to the Moon and we could see for the first time our planet in orbit: the world saw, through the media, the images of the Earth; a beautiful, unique and delicate planet.



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On April 23rd, 1970, the first Earth Day was celebrated in the United States, with a great manifestation in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia.

This pacific protest was promoted by Wisconsin's Senator Gaylord Nelson and the call was attended by 2,000 universities, 10,000 elementary and secondary schools and hundreds of communities.



(© AP Images)



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Due to the pressure, in 1970, the United States Congress created the Environmental Protection Agency, a direct result of the environmental movement caused by *Silent Spring*.

A year later, the United Nations joined to celebrate the Earth Day, when the General Secretary of the United Nations, General U. Thant, signed the official proclamation.



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The Spirit that produced the celebration of the Earth Day continued and began to arise groups and organizations that sought the way to protect the environment, one of them, **Greenpeace**, was born in Canada in 1971 with principles like no violence. This group, besides of protecting the environment, looked for the way to alert the population about the risks of nuclear power.



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In 1972 the first international conference about Environment was celebrated: the “Conference of Stockholm”, its objectives were to sensitize the world-wide leaders on the magnitude of the environmental problems and to institute the policies necessary to eradicate them.

The same year, the government of the United States prohibited the DDT, a pesticide that contributed to put the bald eagle, national symbol of the United States, and other species of birds, on the verge of being extinguished.



(© AP Images/Daily Inter Lake, Karen Nichols)



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Since 1970, the United States has promulgated a series of laws that have helped to improve the environmental conditions:

- Clean Air Law: 1970
- Clean Water Law: 1972
- Species in Danger of Extinction Law: 1973
- Conservation and Restoration of Resources Law: 1976
- Superfund Law: 1980





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One of the activities promoted by the ecological groups is recycling, a simple practice that contributes with the protection of the environment. Several programs for the separation of waste were promoted in many North American communities by the end of the 80's.



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By mid 90's every recycling program was self sustained and more than 20% of the garbage in the United States was used to make new products.

Besides, many companies adopted new ways of reusing their trash and began to promote themselves as friends of the environment.





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Officially, the first World's Earth Day was celebrated in 1990. More than 200 million people from all over the world took part in different activities and events.

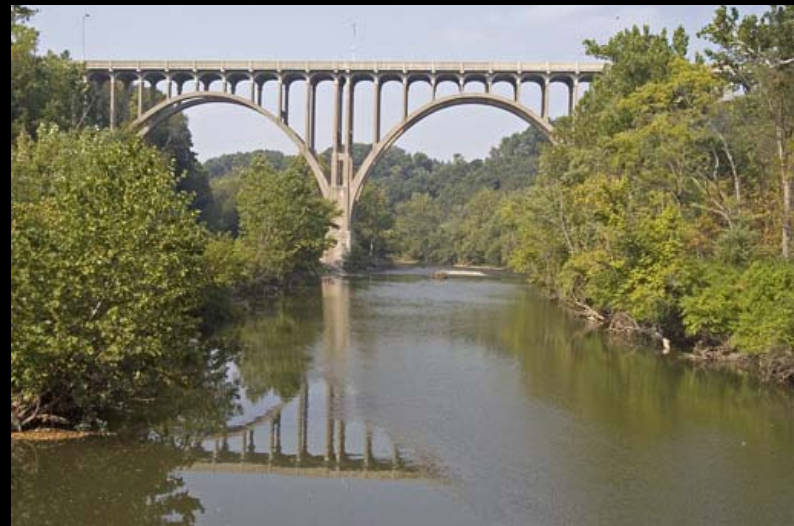
In this way, for the very first time, the world's commitment to protect the environment was recognized.



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The 25th celebration of the Earth Day took place in 1995, and by that time a real commitment with the environment seemed to exist. Many countries improved their air and water conditions and the environmental indicators as well.

Cuyahoga River in Ohio is a real example, because it was totally recovered.



©Patrick Holleran, Shannon Technologies, 1994-2007



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*Green Sea Turtles, specie In danger of extinction.
Photo by: Jim Schultz, Brookfield Zoo AP/WWP.*

The United States is an active member of more than 200 international treaties and agreements about environment, the topics include strategies to protect the Ozone Layer, keep the swampy zones and protect the species in danger, among others.



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"Earth is our home and every human being's home. The Earth itself is alive. We are part of a developing universe. We are part of a community of interdependent life with a magnificent diversity of forms of life and cultures. We feel humble in the presence of the beauty of the Earth and share a reverence for life and the sources of our being..."

(excerpt from The Letter of The Earth).



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- ¿What do you think is the contribution of Colombia to take care of the environment?
- ¿What have you done to help taking care of the environment?
- ¿What else do you think you can do?

